

“My Lord, What a Morning”
Mark 16:1-8
Easter, April 5, 2015
W. Glenn Doak, Preaching

Sometimes our Weekday School children or the Vacation Bible School children will go outside on a sunny day like today and their teachers will give them a nice big piece of pastel chalk and they will begin to draw pictures on the sidewalk either in the courtyard on the parking deck or maybe even the big slab of concrete in front of the church. They will draw funny pictures or write their names or maybe even play tick tack toe.

We love to see the children on their hands and knees having fun with their creation and we wish, don't we, we wish as adults that we could be down there beside them with a piece of chalk. When we think about it though we realize how transitory/temporary it really is. Whatever you draw beautiful, funny, ridiculously passé it will be gone within a couple of hours or at most days. People will walk over it and the first rain will wash it away. The child says, “oh, it doesn't matter I was just having fun with a piece of chalk”, and it is gone in their minds. Maybe the parent in you took a picture of it and placed it where else on Facebook for all to see.

That moment is all that we really know we have. That moment when it was drawn and we celebrated its creation. Some say the same thing about the bigger creation; God's creation of the whole universe, human life and even the after-life. “What you see is what you get,” is a normal mantra. “Why ask for more,” others say. Some see God as a grown up kid, playing games, creating the earth and everything as an existential sport, only to be washed away the next time a cosmic rain falls on this portion of the universe.

I think the chalk drawings on the sidewalk and our idea of it being here today and gone tomorrow is a timely segue into our scripture lesson for the morning. I am talking about the gift of life that God has given us, what God has prepared for us and the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection moment was a moment in time. No one was there to witness what exactly happened. When the women showed up at sunrise it had already happened. The rock was rolled aside, the tomb was empty. Sometime before the dawn God's mystery had worked itself out and what we have is that moment in time when his followers realized he was not dead but alive. My Lord, what a morning it was for them. So, how do we know it's true?

The Biblical evidence supports the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. For some that's pretty elementary stuff I know, some say, “if the Bible says it that is good enough for me.” But let me remind you there are others for whom the Bible isn't anything other than an ancient pre-scientific writing that tries to cast its mortal light on immortal and eternal things. Saying the Bible says it's so convinces some and doesn't convince others. I have a friend who calls the Old Testament just a collection of fairy tales. I am aware that trying to prove the resurrection from the Bible will not satisfy everyone.

What is amazing about the stories in the four gospels is both how similar and different they are. In Luke it seems a whole company of women went to the tomb, in Matthew there are 2 women who go to the tomb, in Mark 3 women and in John one woman.

If someone else like the Pharisees or the Romans had stolen the body then why didn't they produce it when the news started circulating that he had risen? If the disciples had stolen it then why were they so willing to die for something they knew was a fraud? It wasn't like they started making these claims 15 or 20 years later. This was just 36 hours after the crucifixion. The women went out to the tomb ... and there was nothing, just emptiness. My Lord, what a morning.

In Mark the women, are filled with fear and are so startled that they leave immediately and go home telling no one about what they had found. This implies that Jesus may have ascended immediately into heaven, both body and soul solving the body/spirit resurrection debate. The recorded records are fresh and clear; they indicate bewilderment, awe and wonder. It was all too magnificent and marvelous for them to describe. The writers were overcome and lost in the bewilderment of the morning. It was as novel to them as it is to us.

It is also amazing that the early church came to believe that the resurrection was true. That is not as obvious as it first sounds. Anytime something extraordinary impinges on the ordinary, there is always a differing of opinions as to what exactly happened and whether it can be believed as true. Anytime heavenly things break into the earthly realm, fear is the result. Like with the shepherds in the fields and Mary when Gabriel came calling on her.

People ask me time and again if experiences they have had were real. One well balanced and smart parishioner ask if it really were possible that he heard the voice of his departed wife or was he going crazy? "I had a vision of white light and a long tunnel and when I passed through onto the other side I saw my departed husband, parents and other friends who were dead. Please tell me was it true or a figment of my imagination. Was it a dream or was God reassuring me of heaven," she asked.

Early on in my ministry I struggled with how to answer such questions. Then I slowly came to realize that we don't have to settle everything within the bounds of rational experience. I became more open to what others said and told me. Some would say these were just projections of the brain and psyche. Just as many would tell you they were true.

No wonder some of those present that day long ago also had doubts. Remember one of the disciples Thomas didn't believe until he put his finger into the wounds on Jesus' body. Others saw and simply doubted. There in Matt. 28 as the eleven disciples met Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection, "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted."

The early church found the conviction to go on by the witness of its members, those who were willing to face the lions for their Lord, those who were willing to give up family status for their faith. Without that conviction there would have been no church, no reformation, no western civilization, no missionary movement, no abiding concern for health, education and human dignity, and no antidote to hatred and death. Christianity has heralded these advancements in our world. Without belief in the resurrection evil would have triumphant. If Christ had not been

raised, our faith would be in vain. It is all related to how and where they found the power of their convictions that the resurrection happened.

Lastly, the resurrection is compatible with the other things we know about the mysterious way in which God works with his created beings. “Lo, I tell you a mystery,” says Paul about the resurrection. But what is a mystery anyway? Mystery technically means, “Relating to the ways of God, beyond human comprehension.” The creator God normally deals with us in mystery, “Your ways are not my ways, neither are your thoughts my thoughts,” says the Lord.

More informally, a mystery is something that you know happened but you don’t know quite how it happened. This is true on a magician’s stage or on the grand stage of life. Regardless of the explanation we give for the grand scheme of creation we know little about the “how’s” and nothing about the “why’s”. The same could be said for the birth of Jesus. How did the Wise Men know to follow a star? How can you follow a star?

Our lives from birth to death are full of mystery. The mystery of an open door to an empty tomb belongs in the same stream of what we know and what we believe. Is it a greater mystery that life should keep on keeping on than life should have begun in the first place? God did not roll the dice and make life on a whim. It’s just like God to offer a tiny peek over the top of the mountain as a tease that makes you say, “Wow! How did he do that?”

It is as if God said, “Lo, I tell you a mystery. I will share it with you. I will give you a quick peek. Ready? It’s gone!”

The resurrection brings you one word you need to hear: Victory! We need reassurance at the edge of an open grave. We need to believe in the sun even when it is not shining, in love when we do not feel it and forgiveness when it is not received.

Meanwhile, the news you need to hear is waiting for you. You had better hurry or you might miss it. It arrived in Jerusalem on a Sunday morning some two thousand years ago while most of the city was still asleep. The last enemy was met and conquered. Christ triumphant over death and was raised by God. Everything is going to be okay.

You need someone to help you believe that life is more than just chalk marks on the sidewalk, more than something that is temporary and will be washed away by the next rain or rubbed to ruin. You need to know that your life and the lives you love are in his tender care. Are you looking for the truth that God is waiting to share with you this morning? I hope so, “My Lord, What a Morning when the stars began to fall.”